

Medi-Cal Dental Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 4, 2025 – 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Sacramento County Public Health Education Programs

7001-A East Parkway – Conference Room 1

Sacramento CA 95823

Zoom Meeting ID: 161 863 4667

Facilitator: Jonathan Porteus, Chair

Scribe: Laila Zaib

Members Present:

- James Musser
- Jonathan Porteus
- Robyn Alongi
- Sunanda Bandyopadhyay
- Caroll Badgley
- Julie Gallelo
- Monica Montano
- Cherag Sarkari
- Timothy Martinez
- Robin Blanks-Guster
- Cynthia Stuart
- Michelle Monroe
- Judy Lema
- Morgan Musser
- Matthew Mouille
- Denise Canacari
- Debra Payne

Members Absent:

- Bilee Hernandez
- Darrell Kenworthy
- Olivia Kasirye
- David Hughes

Members Called in:

- Mary Jess Wilson
- Shannon McConnell

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Public Present in person or teleconference: A Figueras, Alisha Gutierrez, Audrey Edwards, Amanda Purcell, Brendie Dunlap, Brittany Vacura, Cynthia Johnston, Cynthia Yamasaki, Danielle Cannarozzi, Dwayne Calloway, Eddie Hu, Edith Acevedo, Elizabeth Wong, Felisha Scott, Gigliotti Genevieve, Heather Castiaux, Helen Pham, Jose Morales, Lisa Nguyen, David Goodman, Debbie Blanchard, Destiny Rockwood, Joseph Canas, Katrina Eagilen, Kim Benton, Kimberly Arredondo-Blanco, Jennifer Fitzpatrick, Laila Zaib, Lindsey V, Liz Bishop, Margaret Delmore, Michael Tavallaci, Paula Lee, Pana Lee, Paul Glassman, R. Newman, Rajvir Bhogal, Rima Hakim, Rhiannon Jordan, Rosanna Jackson, Roshani Mehta, Sam Sieden, Santosh Sundaresam, Shakalpi Pendurkar, Shawn Massey, Susan McLearn, Sonia Dhillon, Tara Good-Young, Thomas Lovinger.

2:00	Welcome and Introductions	Meeting called to order by Julie Gallelo.
2:07	Approve Meeting Minutes (Action)	October 2, 2025 minutes reviewed by the Committee. Moved to approve: James Musser Seconded: Sunanda Bandyopadhyay Motion Carried.
2:10	Approve Prop 56 Opposition Letter to the Governor & Legislature (Action)	<p>Purpose of Letter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Committee issued a formal letter expressing strong opposition to the proposed elimination of approximately \$550 million in ongoing Prop 56 supplemental payments to Medi-Cal dental providers in the FY 2026–27 state budget. <p>Key Points Raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violation of Voter Intent: Proposition 56, passed by voters in 2016, was designed to improve access to oral health care for Medi-Cal patients. Significant Progress Attributed to Prop 56: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% of California dentists are now enrolled in Medi-Cal. 27% increase in new dental visits, resulting in nearly one million additional patients receiving care annually. Expanded access has strengthened preventive care and improved system efficiency. Removal of Prop 56 funding threatens the financial sustainability of providers serving the county’s highest-needed populations. <p>Anticipated Consequences if Funding is Eliminated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased Hospital Utilization: More patients expected to seek care in Emergency Departments

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategies to improve oral health education within medical settings. ○ Approaches to strengthen referral pathways and linkage to dental care. ○ Opportunities to align with ongoing CHW initiatives supporting care coordination. ● Michelle offered her expertise and support specifically for the component involving integration of oral health with substance use disorder treatment services.
2:25	Center for Oral Health/Early Smiles Sacramento Update	<p>Organizational Updates – Denise Canacari</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leadership change announced: Jennifer Holtzman, interim CEO, is currently leading organizational transition efforts. ● The organization noted that the year has been both productive and challenging due to internal restructuring and changes in funding streams. <p>Early Smile Sacramento (ESS) Program Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Program Activity (October–December) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ESS screened approximately 94 school sites in October and November. ○ Screening for middle and high schools is on temporary hold due to low consent return rates; program resources are being refocused on elementary schools, where need and participation are higher. ● Program Adjustments & Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ESS staffing has reduced from 5 RDHs to 3, impacting screening capacity. ○ Plans to implement a school-based sealant program are underway, which may generate sustainable revenue. <p>Funding Status and Transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESS is currently operating on bridge funding through the end of December. ● Beginning January, the program will transition from grant-based funding to a billing and reimbursement model. ● Clarifications from Health Plan Representatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health plans confirmed that ESS will be able to bill for preventive oral health services, including fluoride varnish and sealants. ○ The referral system MDRAN may phase out, but health plans can integrate ESS referrals directly into their internal systems.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final confirmation of extended bridge funding request submitted to health plans. <p>Discussion & Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members expressed concern over the unclear funding outlook and encouraged early communication if challenges arise. • Members emphasized the vital role ESS plays in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Screening high-need preschool and elementary populations. ○ Providing navigation and care coordination for children with urgent or unmet dental needs. • Questions raised focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How much of ESS’s current service level can be maintained under the new model. ○ The scale of staffing reductions and corresponding decreases in screening capacity. ○ The need for sustained support from community partners and health plans. <p>ESS Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Billing sustainability will depend on volume, service mix, and capacity to implement a sealant program. • Program expects to continue serving children but acknowledges that service numbers will decline due to reduced staffing. • Leadership transition limits the program manager’s ability to provide details until strategic decisions are finalized.
2:40	California Dental Association Update	<p>State Budget Outlook & Proposition 56 Advocacy Update – Monica Montano</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monica reported that the State of California is projecting a budget deficit for the upcoming fiscal year. • Despite ongoing advocacy efforts, the Governor’s proposed budget is still expected to include cuts to Proposition 56 supplemental dental payments. • A large statewide coalition has formed in opposition to Prop 56 cuts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Currently it includes over 31 organizations. ○ Includes support from Medi-Cal dental plans, as well as the California Medical Association and California Hospital Association. • A formal press release from the coalition is planned within the next few weeks. • The coalition will continue pushing back across multiple policy and advocacy channels.

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		<p>Provider Impact Survey – Preliminary Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The coalition recently closed a statewide provider survey to assess the impact of potential Prop 56 cuts. Approximately 1,500 dentists responded. • Early findings indicate major access concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nearly 50% of responding Medi-Cal dental providers indicated they would disenroll if Prop 56 cuts occurred. ○ An additional 30% stated they would significantly reduce Medi-Cal patient volume.
2:45	Health Authority Commission Update	<p>Capacity Building & County Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members discussed opportunities to adapt successful facilitation models used by other counties. • It was noted that some counties have dedicated consulting and facilitation budgets, whereas local resources remain limited. • The group discussed the possibility of formally requesting county-level support, recognizing that funding opportunities are limited but emphasizing the importance of advocacy efforts. <p>Proposition 56 Advocacy & Coalition Letter Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed cuts would impact both dental and medical providers. • Medical organizations expressed strong interest in using the dental coalition letter as a model and submitting a parallel letter representing medical providers. • Members discussed the anticipated 40% reduction in reimbursement if Prop 56 is eliminated. • It emphasized that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providers already operate on narrow financial margins. ○ Continued reliance on temporary supplemental payments creates long-term instability. ○ Repeated funding fluctuations exhaust providers and lead to system exit. • Advocacy leaders highlighted that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The health sector is facing multiple funding threats simultaneously. ○ Dental advocacy must compete with other major healthcare funding battles. • Members emphasized the need to center patient stories and real-world consequences in advocacy messaging. <p>Patient Story Bank Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated launch will be early next calendar year. • This tool will allow:

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Patients and providers to submit real-life experiences. ○ Use of these narratives in legislative testimony, media, and advocacy materials. <p>Base Rate & Long-Term Payment Reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members reaffirmed that supplemental funding is politically fragile and can be eliminated without notice. Base reimbursement rates require urgent modernization. • It was acknowledged that the state historically avoids increasing base rates during deficits. <p>Cross Commission Collaboration Proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposal was introduced for the Chair of the Dental Advisory Committee (DAC) and Chair of the Health Authority Commission to convene a joint work group focused on long-term funding solutions. • Members were invited to participate in this solutions-focused workgroup. <p>Future Medical Advisory Group Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was announced that the Governor has convened a Medicare Advisory Group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Its focus will include economic policy and program development. ○ It was noted with concern that dental representation is currently absent from this advisory structure.
3:00	Dental Plan Updates	<p>Liberty Dental Plan Update - Dr. Sarkari</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Sarkari reported that during period between October to November Liberty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ added 2 new provider offices and 2 new specialists ○ Conducted 281 provider visits to support network providers ○ Participated in 14 member/community events. ○ Reached and provided education to approximately 1,600 community members. ○ Focus populations included parents with young children, adults with special needs, college students, adults in transitional living and families needing oral health education and navigation ○ Participated in the Care for Sacramento Clinic, a free clinic offering dental, vision, and medical services with approximately 500 attendees. • Member Outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sent approximately 14,000 text messages with oral health education content. ○ Conducted 1,092 outbound calls to members who are new or not yet engaged with the

program to encourage completion of oral health assessments.

- 206 oral health assessments completed.
- Multiple dental appointments scheduled as a result of outreach.

- **Value-Based Program – “BRUSH”**

- Liberty operates a national value-based program focused primarily on Medicaid-enrolled children.
- Because dentistry lacks robust outcome measures, caries risk is used as a proxy outcome.
- Providers submit data over time; if they demonstrate reduction in members’ caries risk, they receive performance-based incentives.
- The program is called BRUSH (“Benefits and Rewards for the Utilization of Services for Health outcomes”).
- Program outcomes have shown reduction in caries risk and improvement in population oral health.
- Results were published in the July issue of the Journal of the American Dental Association.

Health Net Dental Plan Update- Felisha Scott

- Health Net assisted approximately 2,400 members with dental appointments in November.
- Launched a tele-dentistry-based outreach program:
 - Tele-dentistry organization contacts members who have not completed their oral health assessment forms.
 - Focus is on assisting members to complete the assessment, expanding tele-dentistry beyond emergency triage.
- **Community Events & Education**
 - Participated in 25 outreach events, including combined medical and dental events.
- **Provider Network**
 - No new general dentists were added.
 - One new specialist was added.
 - One new office has been added to the network.

DentaQuest update- Matthew Mouille

- Matthew Mouille updated on concern raised regarding a large provider disenrollment from the DentaQuest network:
 - Approximately 800 providers were disenrolled at the beginning of November.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan Explanation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DentaQuest reported an issue related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PML (Provider Master List) and directory matching. ▪ Providers whose NPIs did not appear to match the master list were automatically removed. ○ Subsequent investigation revealed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An additional approved provider file had not been included in the reconciliation process. ▪ Once identified, affected providers were restored to the network. • Impact & Timeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providers discovered the issue when claims began being denied. ○ Claim denials were retroactive to November 1. ○ Resolution took approximately one month. ○ Some providers reported not receiving written disenrollment notices, only learning of the issue through claim denials. • Follow-Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DentaQuest stated that notices were sent and contact information will be updated to improve future communication. All affected providers should now be reinstated. ○ The MCDAC Chair requested an update at the next meeting on claim reprocessing.
3:12	Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A provider shared a workforce impact example: a board-certified pediatric dentist joined their practice specifically due to Prop 56 funding. Loss of Prop 56 would make it impossible to recruit and retain specialists serving high-needed populations. • Leadership clarified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Base rates are set by the State, not health plans. ○ With the projected \$18 billion state budget deficit, rate increases are currently unlikely. ○ Saving Prop 56 remains the highest priority, as no backup funding exists. • Historical context was shared: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prop 56 was previously protected in 2019 through coordinated advocacy and formal letters to the Governor.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Similar letter-writing and coalition efforts are underway now. ○ Legal options to protect voter-approved funding were discussed. ● Members emphasized the importance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Patient stories, media outreach, and public pressure to influence decision-makers. ○ Running dual strategies: aggressive advocacy to save Prop 56 and contingency planning if funding is lost. ● Concern was raised about widespread loss of dental and medical coverage beginning in July, and the importance of ensuring dental is not overlooked in broader coverage discussions. ● A regional center representative warned that special needs patients already face severe provider shortages and would suffer devastating consequences if Prop 56 is eliminated.
3:28	Announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agenda items for the February 5, 2026 meeting were acknowledged and will be finalized by leadership.
3:37	Adjournment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting adjourned by Jonathan Porteus. <p>Next Meeting February 5, 2026 2:00 -4:00 pm at East Parkway.</p>